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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3670
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 0309
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1488
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0113
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1355
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1924
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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TAGS: PREL ETRD SNAR IR TX
SUBJECT: IRANIAN DIPLOMAT PUBLICLY HARANGUES TURKMENISTAN FOR POOR
CROSS-BORDER TRADE MANAGEMENT

REF: ASHGABAT 401

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: During an April 22 Trade Facilitation workshop held in Ashgabat for Central Asian agencies involved in border control and trade, an Iranian diplomat made a 5-minute harangue criticizing the Government of Turkmenistan's handling of its trade with Iran. He specifically referred to recent cases where Iranian truck drivers were arrested for possession of opium for personal use and actions by Turkmen authorities that led to huge losses for the Iranian transportation company involved. The very public way the diplomat raised his government's concerns were clearly directed toward creating maximum embarrassment for Turkmenistan. This strategy will do little to resolve the two countries' on-going dispute over Iran's desire to continue paying rock-bottom prices for Turkmenistan's natural gas. END SUMMARY.

WHY AN IRANIAN DIPLOMAT IS NOT HAPPY

¶2. (SBU) On April 21-22 the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Czech Republic Technical Cooperation Project and EU-UNDP Border Management and Drug Actions Programs in Central Asia (BOMCA/CADAP) held a Trade Facilitation Workshop in Ashgabat. The workshop included officials from Customs, Border Guards, Sanitary Epidemiological and Veterinary agencies from throughout Central Asia, as well as representatives from diplomatic missions and international organizations in Ashgabat. In general, the atmosphere of the workshop was friendly and positive -- until Iranian Embassy Second Secretary Abulhassan Mobasher stood up and launched into a 5-minute tirade criticizing Turkmenistan for its actions related to Iran-Turkmenistan cross-border trade.

¶3. (SBU) Specifically, Mobasher claimed Turkmen authorities had jailed Iranian truck drivers who were in possession of 1.5 grams of opium intended for their personal use. The authorities also seized their cargo. The diplomat complained that Turkmenistan authorities confiscated commodities without notifying the drivers where and how

long they were going to hold them. As a result, Mobasher said, the Iranian transportation company suffered huge losses and had to pay large demurrage fees. Mobasher referred to the Turkmenistan-Iranian commission on border issues established in August 2007, stating that it would be more efficient if the commission could deal with such cases. While none of the Turkmenistan officials attending the workshop responded to these comments, they looked visibly embarrassed by the public nature of Mobasher's outburst.

IRAN WANTS TO PLAY A BIGGER ROLE IN THE REGION

¶4. (U) Mobasher complained that BOMCA didn't invite Iranian officials to the meeting, despite Iran's important role in regional trade. A BOMCA representative responded that the current BOMCA program is designed only for Central Asian countries but they will consider Iranian participation in future meetings.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: We applaud the fact that Turkmenistan's officials are interdicting and holding individuals -- including Iranian truck drivers -- carrying small amounts of opium. The fact that the Iranian diplomat made his accusations in an open forum in front of government representatives from other Central Asian countries will not help a bilateral relationship already strained by on-going arguments over Turkmenistan's efforts to renegotiate the rock-bottom price it receives from Iran for its natural gas. However, Mobasher's outburst does seem to be consistent, with other, similar efforts by the Iranian embassy in Ashgabat recently to embarrass the host government (see reftel). END COMMENT.

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